

Old Fort Des Moines

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eight weeks in the year 1843 the name of Fort Raccoon was given to this place. That was upon the recommendation of Captain Allen, but fortunately for us today the name was disapproved by that grizzled old soldier, Gen. Winfield Scott, and the name Fort Des Moines was given to it rather than Fort Raccoon.

STEAMBOAT TRAVEL

One of the interesting things of that period was the steamboat travel. Today we people who do not use our rivers much are almost amazed to find that the Des Moines not only is today a legally navigable stream, but in the days of the fort, in fact until the railroad came here in 1866, was in fact a navigable stream, and was used for purposes of commerce. It is reported that as many as five steamboats at a single time were tied up at the wharf here. It is also an historical fact that as late as 1859 steamboat traffic ran up the river as far as Fort Dodge, and in the spring of that year one boat made four trips carrying material and settlers into that locality.

With the coming of the railroad, Des Moines clearly passed out of its pioneer stage and became a city. Business increased rapidly here, it early became an industrial center, the same as today, in large measure, but that is another story and does not pertain to pioneer days.

In conclusion let me say this, Fort Des Moines, established by the United States Army in 1843 as a protecting influence for the Indians, has had continuous community life since May 20th of that year, and up to now, when it has become a real metropolis; and that it was literally carved out of the wilderness just 100 years ago today. I am sure we are all glad that we live in a day when 100 years later we can celebrate the accomplishments of the men who had the vision, the foresight and the courage to enter this region when it was not a region of highways or streets or buildings and the like, but was a region of trees, flowers, Indians and wild animals.

OLD FORT DES MOINES¹⁰

BY W. M. McLAUGHLIN

It is said that "great events cast their shadows before them." Therefore, I wish as a preliminary to my talk, to show the con-

¹⁰Address by Wm. M. McLaughlin, Des Moines attorney, before the Des Moines Real Estate Board and at various meetings during the Centennial Anniversary week of May 20, 1943.

ditions and political situation of our country at or about the time our city had its birth, 100 years ago.

In 1803 we accomplished the greatest land deal in history by what is known as the Louisiana Purchase, and thereby extended our dominions to the Rocky Mountains.

All honor to our famed representative to France, Robert R. Livingston, who arranged with Napoleon for the great purchase, and to Thomas Jefferson, who had the foresight to influence congress to ratify and close the deal agreed to by Napoleon and Livingston.

This great acquisition of territory awakened the country to the fact that it should become advised as to the new country involved in the purchase. Jefferson sent Lewis and Clark on their great western exploration and Zebulun Montgomery Pike on his trip to the source of the Mississippi River. The reports of these explorations revealed a wealth of territory almost beyond the comprehension of man.

Europe was fully advised, and the flow of emigration from across the seas was greatly augmented. Our emigration bars were flat, and by 1835 emigration by hundreds of thousands per year landed on our shores. The great triumvirate, Webster, Clay, and Calhoun, were in the United States Senate. The issue of human slavery was before the congress. Webster had delivered his great speech against the threatened possibility of disunion of the states or the breaking asunder of the union. "Liberty and Union, now and forever, one and inseparable" echoed over the Blue Ridge Mountains to the great valley of the Mississippi. The words of the great orator were read in all the capitals of Europe. The spread of slavery to the new territories or restraining it to the states where it then existed was a national issue, a question that was doomed to be decided in the momentuous issues of civil war.

The northwest territories were anti-slavery and the south and southwest were pro-slavery. The emigrants from Europe and our own people of the east and north of the Ohio river preferred to emigrate to anti-slavery territory, hence the great trend of emigration was to the west and northwest territories. Indiana and Illinois had doubled their population in a space of two years, and the tide of emigration constantly increased.

The Indians holding and claiming a great part of Illinois and all of Iowa must be pushed west and out of the way of the tide of the dominant white race that refused to be denied. The Indians were as helpless as the buffalo.

William Henry Harrison from old Vincennes, had journeyed across the prairies of Illinois to St. Louis in 1804, and met there some of the chiefs of the Sacs and Foxes and with the famous

Frenchman Choteau who created in St. Louis the fur market of the world, they, by fair means or foul, purchased all of western Illinois from the Sac and Fox Indians, the purchased land extending from the mouth of the Illinois river to the mouth of the Wisconsin. The Black Hawk War had its origin in this deal. The result was that the Sac and Fox Indians with Chief Black Hawk were forced across the Mississippi river into Iowa. Because of the said purchase Black Hawk and his tribe had fought with the British in the war of 1812 and was in bad repute with our government from that time.

In 1836 Gen. Henry Dodge, Lieut. Albert Lea, Gen. John M. Street, and Capt. Nathan Boone, son of the great Daniel, met the Iowa tribes at Davenport for negotiation of the purchase of 255 thousand acres of land in eastern Iowa, which was known as the Keokuk Reserve. The purchase was made at a cost of seventy-five cents per acre, and the Indians moved westward farther into Iowa, and the newly acquired land immediately teemed with settlers. An historian of the time, an eye witness to the negotiations, has left a vivid picture in words of the scene surrounding the great purchase.

A GREAT COUNCIL OF INDIANS

The Sac and Fox Indians had gathered at Davenport for the momentous event, their wikiups being set up for a distance of two miles on the west bank of the river, and two tribes were on the Rock Island side. The tents were of bark and bulrushes; red and green blankets predominated; the horses grazing on the adjacent prairie, white, roan, spotted, bay and black, and the various colors of the blankets and tents gave the scene an appearance of an Arab encampment; a suggestion of Orientalism. The tents at the south were arranged in the form of a crescent, the tawny warriors being located within the circle, while in front were seated the representatives of the government facing the crescent. The chiefs were seated several feet in front of General Dodge and his assistants. Pashepaho, Poweshiek, Winneshiek, Appanoose, Keokuk, and many other Iowa chiefs were present. Pashepaho, whose encampment had long been on the site of our state capital, with his face painted black, was seated among the chiefs, the black adding to the vicious countenance of the murderer who was called "the stabber"¹¹ because of his many assassinations. Appanoose, tall and straight, of splendid intellectual countenance and ability, and who in 1824 had visited Washington and who

¹¹The Bureau of American Ethnology of the Smithsonian Institution gives "Pashipaho" as the proper spelling, and states that the name "is usually but improperly translated 'the stabber'." He was superior to both Black Hawk and Keokuk, signed the treaty of 1804 at St. Louis, and in his later years was with Keokuk near Ft. Des Moines No. 2.

on his return journey made a speech at Boston, never to be forgotten, sitting there, already looking dissipated from the indulgence in too much whiskey, sold to him by members of the white race, Black Hawk was there, but had no voice in the council. "The sceptre had passed from the hands of Judah." Winneshiek, six feet six inches tall and weighing 250 pounds, all bone and muscle, credited with being a splendid orator, sat there with an appearance equal to a Roman Senator. No one need guess who Keokuk was as he sat there in his neat attire, with keen blue eyes, who seemed to understand and grasp everything going on about him—none other than the famed Chief of the Sac and Fox tribes. His father was of the French nationality and his mother the fullblood daughter of a great Chief of former days.

Keokuk rises to speak; he steps forward and shakes hands with General Dodge, then he steps back and begins his speech, displaying the eloquence and grace of a Cicero. He wears a necklace of bear claws, he wears a green robe, but his chest and right arm are bare. He is wearing white buckskin leggings and white moccasins adorned with beads; his feet are small for a man of his size and proportions; he does not look large because of his perfect figure and erectness, yet he is six feet tall. His right arm has about it the skin of a snake lined with velvet; along the length of the skin of the snake are fastened small bells that tinkle as he raises his arm to gesture. His voice is melodious and his gestures perfect. Such was Keokuk, the friend of the white race, the Indian statesman, and possibly the greatest orator of his race.

The westward movement of the Indians in Iowa made necessary their protection by the government. A neutral strip 40 miles wide, extending from the Mississippi river to the Des Moines river was established as a barrier against the Sioux Indians of northern Iowa and Minnesota. The Winnebagos were permitted to occupy the neutral strip as a sort of buffer between the Sioux and the Sac and Fox Indians. The south line of the neutral strip was slightly north of the town of Boone, and the north line a short distance north of Fort Dodge, where it intersected the Des Moines river.

The first Fort Des Moines was located just north of the town of Keokuk at Montrose, which was vacated and a fort established on the Des Moines river known as Fort Sanford near Ottumwa, which amounted to a few traders' cabins occupied by about forty soldiers.

LAST PURCHASE OF LAND IN IOWA

On the 11th day of October, 1842 the Indians having gathered at Agency, just east of Ottumwa, for the purpose of negotiating a treaty involving the sale of all remaining lands in Iowa belonging

to the Sac and Fox tribes, the treaty being known as the Treaty of October 11, 1842, sold all their remaining lands in Iowa and agreed to remove from the state by the 11th day of October, 1845. This treaty made it necessary that a fort be established farther north than Fort Sanford.

Captain Kearny had viewed the ground at the Des Moines and Raccoon forks and had reached the conclusion that it was unfit for the location of a fort and so advised the government. Capt. James Allen examined the same location and pronounced it favorable, and so advised the government, in part saying, "The Des Moines and Raccoon forks is the proper distance north and south and is at a point about midway between the two great rivers, the Missouri and the Mississippi. There is plenty of wood, rock, grass, water, and all the other natural resources that a fort would require, and the Des Moines river is navigable a large part of the year and will be of great aid in the procuring of supplies by way of the Mississippi river."

The government agreed with Captain Allen, and a fort in line with his recommendations, was ordered. On the 20th day of May, 1843 the troops from Fort Sanford, under the command of Captain Allen, arrived at the junction of the two rivers the Raccoon and the Des Moines, and that day the fort was established and Des Moines was born.

Captain Allen suggested to Gen. Winfield Scott, the head of the army at Washington, that the fort be named "Fort Raccoon" or "Fort Iowa", but neither name appealed to General Scott. He said that Fort Raccoon was not dignified sufficiently as a name for a fort, and directed that the name be Fort Des Moines, notwithstanding the fact that it would really be the second Fort Des Moines. It is an historical fact that James Allen was the founder of Fort Des Moines and the city of Des Moines. It is equally an historical fact that Gen. Winfield Scott named the fort "Fort Des Moines" and that it follows that our city, Des Moines, was named by General Scott.

GENERAL SCOTT HONORS DES MOINES

It is an honor to Des Moines that it was named by Gen. Winfield Scott. He was the same General Scott that fought the British at Lundy's Lane, the same Scott that commanded in the Black Hawk War, the same Scott that captured Vera Cruz, and with Robert E. Lee, Ulysses S. Grant, Jefferson Davis, George B. McClelland, and Albert Sidney Johnson under his command, scaled the heights of Cerro Gordo and captured the capital of Mexico and raised the Stars and Stripes over the famed halls of the Montezumas.

The steamboat which carried the troops from Fort Sanford was

the Agatha. A trapper along the Des Moines river south of the Raccoon, knowing nothing about the proposed fort or the coming of the soldiers, was startled by a commotion down the river on the morning of May 20, 1843. To his amazement he saw and heard the puffing of a steamboat appearing around the bend in the Des Moines river. He saw the smoke and soldiers on the deck and the flag waving on the boat; he also saw Indians mingling with the soldiers. The Indians were Chief Keokuk and his squaws, and Chief Appanoose and his squaws. The Indians never overlooked a steamboat ride if it was possible to obtain it. The boat turned up the Raccoon river at its mouth and there unloaded on its north bank, and Des Moines was founded.

On the following day after the landing a contingent of soldiers arrived from Prairie du Chien, making in all ninety-nine men, including officers and privates. A flagpole was erected on the site and the Stars and Stripes raised. Every morning the sound of cannon echoed up and down the river and over the prairies as the pioneer fort paid its salutation to the Flag. On the arrival of the troops the junction of the two rivers had never before been touched by the hand of civilization. I am reminded of a verse from DeFoe on Robinson Crusoe:

The sound of church-going bells
These rocks and these hills never heard.
As well list for the sound of a knell
Than bells when the Sabbath appeared.

While on that famed morning of the 20th of May, 1843 the junction of the Des Moines and Raccoon rivers and its immediate surroundings was the same as it had been for a thousand years, yet settlement had advanced across Iowa to a line north and south through Iowa City and Keosauqua. Burlington was the largest town in the state and Dubuque was second. Keosauqua was already a village. Iowa City had progressed far enough to have been chosen as the seat of the capital of Iowa, and the old stone capital building had been in course of construction for three years and the work had sufficiently progressed that a few state officers were already located in the building.

ALLEN A COMPETENT MILITARY LEADER

Captain Allen appeared to be a far-seeing man. He had the vision of a city following a temporary fort. He laid out roads to Iowa City and Mount Pleasant. He procured the erection of a sawmill on Middle river where the trees were larger and procured his lumber and logs for the construction of the officers' quarters and barracks of the fort. He discovered limestone on Four-Mile creek and

thus was enabled to provide the necessary mortar. He found clay along the Des Moines river and thus was able to have the necessary building brick. On the establishment of the fort the Indians moved their camp near and along the Des Moines river. Keokuk located his tribe on the west side of the Des Moines river near the old town of Avon; he moved out on the prairie in the summertime and back to the woods along the river in the winter. He occasionally camped near the fort on ground now occupied by our stores and office buildings.

During the time of the fort the squatters were constantly moving westward toward the Des Moines river ready to stake out claims as soon as the Indians departed. Traders and trappers were constantly about the fort. They raced horses in competition with the Indians. The racing ground extended from West Ninth Street east to Fifth Street, almost on a line with Mulberry Street. Betting between the whites and Indians on the races was common, and tradition tells us that the Indians paid their bets with much better grace than the whites paid theirs. The soldiers kept a census of all the Indians down to the youngest papoose.

On the 11th day of October, 1845 the period for the Indians remaining in Iowa expired,¹² and they were to be moved in conformity with the treaty of three years before, to the territory of Kansas. At midnight a cannon was fired from the fort as a signal that the Indians' time in Iowa had expired. The Indians had scattered out in small groups into various places of seclusion, hoping that they would be overlooked and escape removal. The dragoons, however, had gathered them up and brought them into the fort. The Indians were taken across the Raccoon River at the fort and to Van's Hill which is just east of the south end of the Southwest Ninth Street bridge where they took their last, lingering look at the rivers and valleys so long inhabited by their ancestors. They exclaimed, "No go, no go; me stay here, me stay here," but the rifles and bayonets in the hands of the soldiery were to them inexorable law, and they turned their faces to the southwest and began their trek to Kansas.

Charles Atherton Cumming, the late artist of Des Moines, painted a mural which is on the fourth floor of our Polk County courthouse. It is a fine delineation of the Indians leaving their old barracks. The picture reveals the corner of the barracks and soldiers standing nearby, and the Indians seem to have a sorrowful look on their faces, their sorrow being revealed in the picture by the famed artist.

¹²On the urgency of Captain Allen the time was extended for removal of the Indians until the following spring. The order for abandonment was given Feb. 23, 1846, and March 10, the troops marched out and hauled the flag down. The settlers rushed in at once and occupied the fort buildings. Lieut. Grier superintended the evacuation.—ANNALS OF IOWA, IV, 176.

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